FRENCH RUM RUNNERS BAR AMERICAN CREWS

Miquelon Islanders Insist Upon Supplying Officers and Half of Men So That Trade May Be Conducted in Gentlemanly Manner and Mother Country Says 'Go to It!'

Special Dispatch to THE NEW YORK HERALD.

ST. PIERRE, Miquelon, Oct. 2.—That you may have a fuller understanding of that which follows herein, a description of the approach to and the harbor of this intoxicated French colony must precede. I shall try to make it quick and painless. You might, too, if you are sufficiently interested, get out a map of the east coast of North America. You will find the Miquelons and St. Pierre due east of the Cape Breton end of Nova Scotia and ten miles south of Newfoundland.

It is here repeated that no finer site for a full play of the rum runner's art could be found. The group consists of three principal islands and three small bowlders of granite blurted out of the ocean as though by accident. As you approach from the west you are greeted by Grand Miquelon and Little Miquelon (the latter sometimes called Langlade).

Bleak, forbidding, treeless, almost without any vegetation and virtually uninhabited, they rise to a height of 600 feet. Clouds of white birds ascend from the rock crevices as a ship approaches, and until your craft drops anchor in front of St. Pierre this feathery blizzard enfolds you.

You round Cape Coupe, and there to the east lies the tiniest of the three principal islands—St. Pierre. And for the first time you see signs of human presence in the group. A huddle of wooden buildings, battered and bleached by the cruelest of seas, is Savoyard. It's a pretty, primitive place; the people dwelling therein are primitive. A Brittany coast village, divided by twenty (in all things), would seem about right if a diagnosis of Savoyard is required of me. Certainly the place is comparable with nothing under the Stars and Stripes.

You keep on running northeast and presently turn east—and there you are. On your left the Isle aux Chiens—Dogs' Island—with another but less wretched clutter of fishermen's houses and a wooden white church lording it over the clutter. On your right the town of St. Pierre—a settlement of hardly more than 2,500 persons, chiefly middle aged and old and very young. The war and the lure of the outer world have taken the young men and women away. The whole island is but four miles long and three miles wide.

Waiting for Spring.

With the exception of the church and a few of the water front buildings St. Pierre is built of wood. On several occasions fire has wiped it out. There is no reason why a fire, well started, should not obliterate it. There is no defense against fire. Like Grand and Little Miquelon, the island of St. Pierre is treeless. Firewood is imported from Newfoundland. There are no newspapers, no hotels, no theaters, and only a few cafes. And permit me to say in passing, to you who think you have sought entertainment in hard boiled resorts in Mexico, the West Indies, the mining countries and so on, form no fixed opinions until you have spent a night or so in the water front places in St. Pierre.

At the western end of the town stands a fair sized cold storage plant erected by the French Government during the war and completely and modernly equipped. It has never been used. Any afternoon you may behold squads of rum runners looking with a terrible longing at the three concrete piers tonguing into the harbor from this plant. American and Canadian booze smugglers have offered thousands of dollars for the temporary use of these piers, but never successfully. But wait until next spring!

Next spring! Next spring! To the people of St. Pierre "next spring" carries all the hope and confidence that "Der Tag" did to the junkers before 1918. Next spring! Ha! How they rub their palms together! After all these years of horrid poverty—next spring!

But let us hurry on. There is much to tell. For physical facts about St. Pierre that would be tedious here apply to your geographical society.

Time was when St. Pierre was a festive place. Two hundred French officials sent out from Paris to govern the islands, fifty young Englishmen, Canadians and Frenchmen working in the banks and cable offices, and consular staffs from the United States, Great Britain and elsewhere were stationed at St. Pierre. You can still hear tales of the departed glories of the place.

But that is gone—all gone. In those good days it was not at all unusual to see 1,000 fishing trawlers in the harbor. The town was in the habit of exporting 30,000 tons of cod a year and receiving therefor $2,000,000. There was a permanent population of more than 6,000 persons. There was a newspaper, a theater, a real club and no end of social gladness.

Why St. Pierre Wilted.

And then the Newfoundland law that forbade the sale of bait (squib principally) to the St. Pierre fishermen. That killed St. Pierre. St. Pierre was entirely surrounded by cod, but almost barren of bait? The reasons? They are several. First, trade jealousy. By virtue of the peculiar French system of fishing bounties, St. Pierre could undersell Newfoundland in Europe. Second, Newfoundland found that its fishermen were less eager to fish than they were to sell bait to men of St. Pierre. Forbidding the sale might ruin St. Pierre, but it would compel Newfoundland trawlers to get busy. But that is sufficient explanation.

St. Pierre wilted and almost died. It caught enough fish to keep itself alive. No longer self-supporting, it lost its 200 officials, who were jerked back to Paris. To-day there are but an administrator and a couple of secretaries from the mother country. The United States withdrew her Consul, leaving a consular agent for a while, but presently he fled. It was a good bit like a giant stricken in his mature strength and crawling off to die of anemia. Sometimes there were fewer than twenty trawlers where 1,000 were once observed heavy with fish.

France talked of selling the islands to England, to America, to Japan, to whosoever cared to buy or might be permitted to buy. They represented nothing but a liability. It would be silly to fortify them even if England and America would stand for it. In case of war—poof! France was not going to risk her fleet in the defense of a chronic liability.

And then came the great war. In sheer desperation France reached out and drafted the [illegible] of St. Pierre. She had to draft these men; they were not volunteering. Patriotism had died along with prosperity. And the idle trawlers from which all odor of cod had long since evaporated were turned into transports for the conscripts.

Now for it! Now for the renaissance of St. Pierre! Now is the winter of St. Pierre's discontent made glorious summer by this sun of Volstead. Prohibition came in the United States and from the United States to St. Pierre came strangers, some slick and neat, with bulging purses, and some rough and harsh, with hard fists, loaded pistols and utter contempt for laws. They found St. Pierre a little sophisticated in the ways of smuggling, for, like Bahamians, smuggling had been adopted now and then to relieve poverty. Besides, they already understood the gentle art of rum running because of the aridity of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Why France Relented.

No sooner had the Eighteenth Amendment become a segment in the American Constitution than all St. Pierre besought the French Government to remove the restrictions upon the importation into the islands of the hard liquor of countries other than France. But France was slow to act. She was loath to offend rich America. The Bahamas came to life, and in eighteen months discharged their public debt of £200,000, besides appropriating $1,000,000 for public improvements. Why not St. Pierre? Here was St. Pierre's opportunity to jump from one side of the French ledger to the other; to quit the role of insolvent dependency and once more rise to the heights of a self-sustaining colony.

But France went slowly. Little by little France began to understand that her statesmen were making no progress toward softening the American determination to collect debts. And as France began to realize this she began seeing St. Pierre's point of view.

First of all France told St. Pierre that it would be all right to permit the transfer in the St. Pierre harbor of alien hard liquor from one vessel to another. That started it. A British ship from Glasgow laden with whisky would transfer her cargo to a ship flying the French flag (she had been an American bottom but a few hours since), and off would go the cargo to slake the thirst of the Atlantic coast. St. Pierre had become a liquor transfer point.

But St. Pierre indicated the injustice of it. She showed her French mother that this helped only those merchants who had sufficient money to plunge into the shipping business. She showed, too, that this partial lifting of the embargo had fetched to St. Pierre rich American and Canadian shippers such as the David A. Clarkson Importing Company, who merely paid St. Pierre what they chose for the labor that she had to offer.

And then, just before the first of January, 1922, France lifted the embargo. She told St. Pierre to go to it; import and export to her reviving heart's content; make all the money she could while the making was possible. And St. Pierre went to it!

Feverish Business.

Regard, as I write, the waterfront of this town—the wild confusion of reviving commerce, the feverish speed of the hitherto moribund business houses, the scramble of native and alien merchants for deserted fish storehouses, the clanking and rattling of steam winches and loading cranes (Olympian music to hungry St. Pierre), the soaring rentals for cellars and long vacant dwellings, the slam and rasp of hatchet and saw, the rumble of casks and barrels rolled down the street, the slap and thud of cases piled upon cases.

But better than all, observe the erstwhile deserted harbor. Stand in front of the store of J. B. Legasse, there facing the quay, and count the schooners and yachts and steam trawlers and even one American converted submarine chaser. Fifty of them. Some of them are loaded and are only waiting evening when they will streak out past Savoyard and Little Miquelon to peddle liquor to smaller craft along the American coast. Others have just returned for another load. Yet others are here for their maiden voyages under the invisible Jolly Roger.

Suppose we take a small motor boat and visit. We shall pass by the converted submarine chaser. She left St. Pierre eight days ago bound for New York waters. The natives laughed when Thompson, the American who fetched here here, arrived for his cargo.

"Laugh if you want to but let me explain," replied Thompson. "She's the fastest thing in the Atlantic for her size. What I intend doing is to make quick trips and frequent ones. I can get to New York in ten days with this boat. The trawlers take sixteen days sometimes. I can stow away 2,500 cases and after a half dozen trips I can quit for the winter and join the big push in the spring."

"With that conspicuous thing," jeered the natives, "you will never make one trip. Why, man, all you lack is an electric sign announcing your mission and some liberal advertising in the American newspapers. You'll never get as far as Cape Cod."

And he didn't. As a matter of fact he was somewhere off Portland when an American revenue cutter sighted him and gave chase. He put about and returned to St. Pierre. And there he lies with $40,000 worth of liquor aboard and nowhere to go.

Armed Americans.

We come to a schooner capable of carrying 3,000 cases. She will be loaded to-morrow. In her stern sit five Americans with Winchester rifles. They are taking pot shots at blackfish that weave about the harbor like porpoises. We ask permission to come aboard.

"Why? Who are you?"

"Oh, we just want to look over your ship. We're new at the game and want to borrow information."

There is much laughter at the greenhorn, but we are permitted aboard. Virtually everything except the engine and a modicum of cabin space has been divorced from the inside of this schooner—the Mirabelle. In a rack in the cabin are fifteen more Winchesters and twelve .44 caliber automatic pistols. There are three cases of ammunition.

"What's the idea?" I asked. "Are you going to declare war on something?"

"Hell, no; you don't fight in this business unless you have to. Did you ever hear of pirates?"

"Sure."

"Well, so have we. Also we heard of what became of the Richard E. Welch and another schooner named the Linda or something like that. If you're going to run booze you ought to know about them, although I never saw anything like it since I've been running stuff out. Maybe it's bunk and maybe it ain't."

It was the captain of the Mirabelle, a Yankee from Portsmouth, whose name is not Smith, who was doing the talking.

"As I get it," he said, "it was in the late spring of 1921. There wasn't much doing here then; only once in a while. This Richard E. Welch, which hadn't taken the trouble to change from American to British or French registry, sneaked out of this harbor with 4,000 cases on board. She got no further than Little Miquelon, which ain't far, when a trawler crossed her and made her pull up.

"As I get it, the skipper of the Welch had a gat on him and so did three of his men. But that was all. Some say there were Frogs in the trawler and some say there wasn't—not that it makes any difference. Anyway, 4,000 cases of stuff were in Savoyard next day, according to the way I get it, and the Welch was being pounded to pieces on the dunes that connect Big and Little Miquelon. Nobody ever heard of the crew of the Welch again.

"As I get it the 4,000 cases were sold all over again to a trawler flying the French flag, and that was that. So we're carrying guns. If a Government boat gets us our hands are in the air, for we ain't fighting the United States Government and we ain't taking no chances with the one pounders the Government boats carry."

Pirates Kill Runners.

"Well what happened to the Linda, or whatever her name was?"

"As I get it," replied the skipper, "she was huckstering booze off the Jersey coast one night last summer when a motor boat hails her. She's expecting a motor boat, and so she wasn't suspicious. And what happens? Why, this. The motor boat is full of pirates, and they being armed like a convention of constables and the Linda's crew having nothing but a couple of gats the pirates take over the cargo, murder the Linda's crew and peddle the stuff themselves.

"Of course that may not be exactly true, but it is as I get it."

We run on to a schooner which is minus its bowsprit and a large section of its forward deck. A little Cockney is on watch. The Union Jack flies from the stern. The schooner is the Mary Fellowes of Jamaica, B. W. I.

"What happened to you?" I asked the Cockney.

"Chopped," he replied, "chopped by a bloody freighter fifteen miles off Cape Cod Light. Can't let you board, but if you ask me to-night in one of those cafes ashore there I'll damn well 'arrow you with a story. Is the place as bad as it looks?"

"Well, it's picking up every minute."

"Can't be as bad as it looks. Ever been in Zanzibar?"

"No."

"That ain't as bad as it looks either."

"Good. I'll see you in the Cafe du Havre to-night."

We called at twelve schooners. Every one was heavily armed with rifles and pistols. One of them, the Elsie of St. Pierre (a new name newly painted in), boasted a German machine gun and twenty iron boxes of ammunition. At her quarter rail lolled a youth who wore in the lapel of his coat the official insignia of a soldier honorably discharged from the American Expeditionary Forces.

"Hello, buddy," he grinned, observing similar insignia on the coat of the reporter. "Like being back in the army in France again, ain't it?"

"Yes, only it's harder work."

"You said it; but look at the difference between thirty-three a month and this. Some graft!"

"Your boat?"

"Hell, no; how'd I swing a deal like this? I'm just working for the guy who put up the jack. He was in the A. E. F., too—Quartermaster Corps."

"Where's he?"

"Damfino. Wondering where we are I guess. We're ten days overdue."

"'Struble?"

"Damfino. Something wrong with the shipment. We came up here to get 4,000 cases of stuff, and the foolish Frog we were to get it from sold it to some one else. Now we got to lay around waiting for a cargo to arrive from Scotland. We're handling something good, nothing bad. Two other guys on the boat were in the same army as you and me were. What are you doing? What's the idea? The whole A. E. F. bootlegging?"

"Where are you unloading when you do get away?"

"Anywhere the boss says. Before we go the captain gets a cable in code and then he dopes it out and finds that the boss has arranged to have motor boats take stuff off us at various points down the coast."

"Ever get into any trouble with the prohibition navy?"

"The what navy?"

"The prohibition boats."

"No; we stick fifteen miles out. They can't touch us. The little boats get the stuff off and beat it for the shore. It's up to them."

"Where'd you get the German machine gun?"

"Don't know. Was on here when I shipped with this outfit at Nassau. That's where I'm handy. I can run it. Haven't had a chance yet except practicing on blackfish and porpoises, but it will come in handy for pirates. Believe me, this is the life. First this schooner was an American. It goes to Nassau, where it changes to British registry and picks me up. There's some sort of a jam about something, so we come up here and change to French registry. First they said it couldn't be done, but the captain did it."

Changing Registry.

We shall leave the schooners for a moment while I explain how easy it is to change from American to French registry.

Suppose we assume that you and I purchase a schooner in the States. Let it be any sort of a ship. She is flying the Stars and Stripes. We proceed here to St. Pierre. We go to any reputable liquor dealer in the colony and tell him that it is our wish that our cargo carrier fly the French instead of the American flag. We make this change of flags for safety's sake, of course.

With the liquor merchant we go before the local French authorities. Have we the authorization of the American Government (provided the vessel was purchased by us from the United States Shipping Board) to sell the boat if we desire? We have, of course. The French official inspects it. Does he understand that we are selling this vessel to Jacques le Fraude for a certain sum?

"Yes," we reply.

"Have you the bill of sale proving your ownership?"

"It is here, your Honor."

"Be so good, then, as to produce your latest clearance papers."

"Behold them," we reply producing such documents.

"Very good. Return this afternoon and receive from me the certificates proving that the said Nancy Lee is now under French registry and privileged to call upon the protection of the French Government in all emergencies. It will cost you, my dear sir, three and a half francs a ton—a mere nothing."

"Thank you, Monsieur le Commissionaire."

"But just a moment," (as you are departing), "you must understand that this transfer of registry means that this ship must be commanded by a French captain and equipped with a French mate, and a French engineer. Moreover, precisely one-half of the crew must be Frenchmen."

"And the other half?" you inquire politely.

"As you will, Monsieur—French, American, British, Portuguese, Spanish mixed or black or white. To the French law it is of no consequence."

You leave satisfied. You have to be satisfied. But you are moved to ask why this French preponderance of personnel. It is simple. In the first place, it affords work for thousands of French sailors out of jobs. There is no evading the rule. If you can't find a captain, a mate or an engineer, or all three of them, in St. Pierre, you are required to apply to the authorities, who will, when you deposit the requisite amount of passage money, cable to France for the men you require.

A good captain costs you from $150 to $200 a month. A first class engineer a little less. A mate costs you from $75 to $150 a month. And they all expect bonuses.

The second reason for all this French personnel aboard our rum runner is this: France observed the operations in the Bahamas of the roughneck element the rum running business attracted to those islands. She had reports of their various exhibitions of lack of culture. Did they not rob, brawl, shoot, knife, and in sundry ways make life a little less pleasant in the beautiful Bahamas? But yes.

Well, then! Is St. Pierre not to benefit by what was observed in Nassau and West End, Grand Bahama and in Bimini? Of a certainty, Monsieur. A certain license that the colony may be attractive to the liquor buyer, yes. But open the gates wide to the American Apache or gunman? Never!

(The third story of this series, to be published to-morrow morning, will deal more intimately with the method of doing business in St. Pierre and the prices exacted.)

NEW LIQUOR SMUGGLING BAN.

Regulations Under Latest Tariff Promulgated.

WASHINGTON, Oct. 2.—New customs regulations under the tariff act of 1922 prohibiting the importation of intoxicating liquors without a permit were promulgated to-day by the Treasury.

They provide for the seizure of liquors, the seizure of the vehicle in which importation is attempted and the imposition of a liability equal to the value of the liquors upon the person in charge of the vehicle seized.

JUDGE SAYS NATION WILL ALWAYS BE DRY

Tells U. S. Grand Jury Fight of Wets Is Hopeless.

CHARLOTTE, N. C., Oct. 2.—Federal Judge Webb, in charging the new Grand Jury here to-day, declared that "the hope in the hearts of a minority of this country that liquor is coming back is fast dying out."

"The bootlegger and the blockader are fighting a hopeless cause," he said in calling the Grand Jury's attention to the Volstead act as a law whose enforcement the jury should guard.

"The United States has never been whipped in any war yet and it will not be whipped in the battle which has been joined by these enemies of America's homes, of American traditions, of American institutions and of American destiny. The only war, I pray God, that this Republic will ever be forced to engage in hereafter is the war to drive liquor eternally out of existence in our land."